31 October 2009

European Commission
DG External Relations
European Neighbourhood Policy
ENP General Coordination Unit [ER/D1]
200 rue de la Loi
B-1049 Bruxelles

Dear Sir,

Proposals of the Belarus EU Business Council for the first meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 16–17 November 2009, Brussels

This letter is sent in response to the invitation to provide written contributions to the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

The BEUBC represents the interests of businesses and non government organizations, and is ready to donate its time, skill and expertise to assist communications between authorities and civil society in Brussels, Minsk and the regions of Belarus. We believe that business dialogue has an important role to play in sharing experience about best business practice, corporate responsibility' and in the promotion of good governance – not just in business alone, but also in society. We recommend that Eastern Partnership programme activities should be pragmatic and there should be direct involvement of civil society business organizations as beneficiaries under EaPP pilot projects. Budget priority should be given to implement well designed pilot projects and technical assistance projects in recipient countries rather than arranging big conferences of a general nature.

Recommendations on Forum.

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (NGOs) are examples of organisations that have proved their abilities to be prime movers of networking and cooperation, and to support internationalization of both big and small enterprises in EU partner countries. For this reason, we recommend that the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry should be made a member of the Civil Society Forum in order to represent the interests of the Belarusian business community and their employees – more than 1600 large, small and medium enterprises with different forms of ownership.

Recommendations on the Eastern Partnership Structures.

We welcome this Forum and stress the importance of using this as a means of support for building people-to-people contacts between businesses in the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. We recommend that a working group on business contacts should be set up within the Forum for this purpose. This working group should be the voice of business tasked to provide sound recommendations on how to make certain mechanisms of the Eastern Partnership (in particular within

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platform 2) more pragmatic and of direct practical benefit to stimulate trade and business co-operation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries.

Recommendations on Economic integration and convergence with the EU policies.

We recommend that a flagship business project (see below) aimed at upgrading business involvement in the internationalization process and market access should be worked out and launched with the help of the BEUBC and the Belarus Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the framework of the EaPP. The main objectives of the project should be the development of cooperation and further integration of Belarusian businesses (mainly SMEs) into the European Chamber network with a special focus made on the creation of capacity-building partnerships with the CCIs from EU member-states and an emphasis on the introduction of new, innovative services with regional chambers in the sphere of local development and internationalization. This would strengthen traditional trading contacts to step up trade in goods and services between partners, and enhance intra-regional trade and economic integration.

Recommendation for Pilot Projects for Energy

Under the new strategy of the EBRD for Belarus, due to be voted on in December, there will be a new budget line for expenditure on municipal environmental infrastructure projects, and energy efficiency projects in Belarus. We recommend that under the Eastern Partnership a facility should be made available for project preparation across all EaPP countries – but in particular for Belarus (e.g. in the sphere of treatment of civic and industrial waste) – so that a pipeline of good projects that are financially viable can be brought forward in order to benefit from the EBRD's new focus. We also recommend that pilot projects should be developed under the EaPP to finance feasibility studies for waste to energy initiatives that directly tackle the problem of urban waste.

Recommendations on Flagship Business Initiative and Pilot Projects

We recommend a flagship business project aimed at upgrading business involvement in the internationalization process and market access should be worked out and launched in the framework of the EaPP. A good example of just such an initiative is the successful cooperation between Turkey and the EU. In May 2004 the Turkish Chamber Development Programme was launched. This Programme included the following business support programmes:

- ✓ Foreign Language Centre: a means to reinforce the role of CCI in the development of new competitive skills of their members (in cooperation with CCI Lyon(FR)
- ✓ Building professional and sustainable knowledge and competence through SMEs internationalization and investment promotion facilities (in cooperation with CCI Marseille-Provence(FR)
- ✓ Increasing the technical capacity of CCI through the implementation of quality service for the enterprises (in cooperation with CCI Valencia(ES)
- ✓ Setting up a Foreign Trade Support Unit for SMEs: a way to improve international cooperation (in cooperation with CCI Rotterdam (NL)
- ✓ Internationalizing Turkey by means of training sessions, seminars, workshops, and best practices presentation (in cooperation with Danish CCI (DK)
- ✓ Developing business support services to boost companies' internationalization (in cooperation with Unioncamere Liguria (IT)

- ✓ "Start-Exporting Programme": promoting Turkish non-exporting SMEs' internationalization (in cooperation with CCI Madrid (ES)

Flagship Business Support Programmes

Learning from this experience, we recommend introducing similar business support programmes for Belarusian SMEs, and members of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Programmes could be introduced in 4 areas:-

1. Internationalization of SMEs
2. Participation of SMEs in international fairs and exhibitions
3. Creation of a Foreign Language Centre for SMEs
4. Organizing a range of training sessions, seminars, workshops, and presentations for SMEs

The BEUBC is ready to assist in this process, and to bring these ideas to life; but financial support and lecturers from EU entities will be needed. For successful implementation of business support programmes under the Eastern Partnership Programme we recommend that there should be a permanent representative of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce based in Brussels working in partnership with the BEUBC, and tasked with responsibility for this Programme, and that the set up costs for this representation should be covered by the budget of the Programme. This initiative could also be rolled out to all 6 member countries of the EaPP, and we would be pleased to offer our support in order to achieve the fast roll-out of a pilot project for Belarus in the first instance.

Yours Sincerely

James Wilson
Director

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